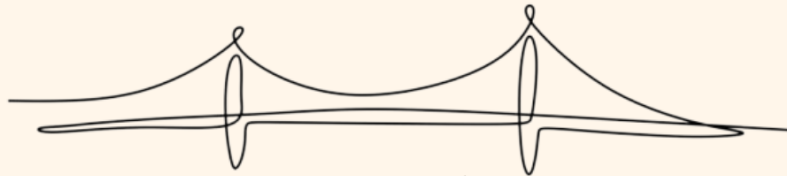


Between HERE and the BRIDGE

Building skills before you need them



A young person's guide to crossing

Between HERE and the BRIDGE

The Nigerian Student's guide to crossing and excelling in the work pool

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This book was developed as a part of a capstone project and reflects the author’s original ideas, research, interpretations and experiences. Any external sources, concepts or referenced materials have been acknowledged appropriately.

Introduction

The average Nigerian student spends the majority of their time in school learning and studying their various courses; this is widely encouraged amongst society and peers. A phrase so commonly used when the thought of life after school crosses is “*we’ll cross the bridge when we get there*”. The reality doesn’t dawn until they are launched into the work pool and have nothing but the knowledge they’ve gained to see them through. Every year, the education system graduates thousands of students who are theoretically sound but handicapped in practice.

Most employers don’t only look for the brightest minds but also those who are able to put the skills they’ve learnt to good use and contribute value to their organization.

This book was written as part of a capstone project, but its purpose extends to increase job literacy and improve work employability skills amongst Nigerian university students and to equip with the skills to enable them thrive in the professional world.

Across the chapters, you’ll find discussions on the various skills and knowledge you need to know to prepare you as you launch into your career. Each section is designed to help you think differently and put in the active effort to ensure you are well prepared before the “*bridge*” arrives.

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Job Literacy and The reality of the Modern market

Job literacy can be defined as the ability to understand how employment systems work and how to navigate them effectively. This is not limited to academic qualifications or ability of a fellow, it also includes understanding positioning, how to access opportunities and function within professional environments.

Job literacy is very important to know as a common misconception many individuals have is to mistake having skills as the key to securing a job; many people think intelligence, qualification or talent is enough and while these things matters and is oftentimes the bedrock, it isn't sufficient. Most employment processes are structured and filtered, hence why many graduates struggles with finding employment. This is not a skill issue, it's however a lack of understanding of how the job market operates. This is where job literacy becomes relevant.

In the modern society, Employers don't only evaluate what you are skilled with, they also check communication, adaptability, professionalism, digital awareness, problem solving ability and emotional intelligence alongside technical competence.

To stay advantaged, an individual needs to know how to master these requirements to become to candidate employers actively seek.

A core thing a candidate should always seek is to understand job descriptions properly, these are usually more than a list of tasks a job requires but also includes employer's values and expectations. Job-literate persons learn how to interpret these requirements strategically rather than randomly applying to every job without checking whether their skills match the role.

The following chapter explores relevant skills job-literate individuals equip themselves with and how you can develop them too.

Skills Development

Skills development is the process of acquiring and improving abilities that increase personal effectiveness and professional value. In lay man terms, it means improving yourself. The world is ever advancing and those who wish to stay on top have to learn to advance with it. The modern workplace holds values in individuals who can apply knowledge practically, adapt to changing systems and continuously improve. As industries rise through technology and globalization, skill development becomes a necessity rather than an option.

Each profession has unique identifiable skills an individual needs to be equipped with, and while there are myriads of them, outlined below are the major skills relevant to all fields of practice. It's important to know that proper research is needed before venturing into any field.

- CV building and personal branding
- CV writing
- Professional communication and negotiation
- Digital skills
- Using AI (artificial intelligence)

CV building and personal branding

CV (Curriculum Vitae) is a written account of one's life, education and experience to seek positions in academic or professional environments.

Personal branding is the intentional process of shaping how people perceive you professionally and personally. It involves presenting your skills, values, personality and expertise in a clear consistent way.

A lot of people believe these two terms are only needed during interviews, but it is important in everyday life as well. Whether consciously or unconsciously, your personal brand is being built every day, it shapes how people you and your reputation, this influences how people can trust you, the opportunities that come around you, your relationships and even your professional growth. Like earlier stated, your personal brand is being shaped every day, the difference is whether you are in control or it's being built for you.

In professional environments personal branding helps one stand out in competitive situations. People are more likely to trust you and what you bring if you've proved to be consistent in it, whether in success or failure, it makes you predictable, and people love predictability.

It is basically the identity people associate with you. One can be labeled as a 'reliable problem solver' if that person has proved to help solve problems over time, or the 'creative and innovative thinker' if they've shown to be one. Now how does this apply to a professional setting, take for example person A and person B goes for the same interview, person A sends a Structured CV, has a clear email, shows up for the interview early and answers questions confidently and honestly, their personal brand becomes 'applicant is very professional and prepared'. While person B who arrives late, has a messy CV, uses informal words in emails and struggles to explain experiences clearly, they are labeled as "applicant is unprepared and

inconsistent”. It should be no wonder when person A gets the job even if person B is far more experienced and went to a better school.

A personal brand cannot be faked, employers can see right through and if you manage to get the job, the cracks will in no time appear. Your personal brand can be developed through intentional consistency in behavior, communication style, skill development and online presence, when people become accustomed to your growth and output, it becomes easier to trust you.

A CV is basically a written version of your personal brand in the job market. It’s a written documentation of the skills and experience you consciously developed while building your personal brand.

CV building is the process of designing and structuring Curriculum Vitae in a way that clearly presents your skills, education and experiences to potential employers. It’s the first impression they will have of you.

CV building is an important aspect that is slept on. A person would be misled to believe that involving in a lot of activities means building the right skills. Let’s look at the case of Person C who wishes to work in finance but only has experience as a football coach. Is it a useful skill? Yes when interpreted as being a team player and organized but that won’t really provide a strong CV unless they were in charge of the Teams finances. Or person D who learnt fashion design and can proudly state experience in customer feedback and satisfaction if they’re interested in customer care.

The key to building a strong CV is to identify your career prospects and build relevant skills towards it while there’s abundant time. Always seek to learn and improve even before you’d need to use them, and luckily in our technological generation, there are abundant courses, opportunities, clubs and fellowships you can be a part of.

CV writing

This is the theoretical part of CV building, putting them on paper. CV writing is you expressing your skills and experiences in clear structured language so that your employers can quickly understand your value. It’s not about using big and complicated words, it’s about clarity precision and relevance. Most employers only spend a few seconds scanning a CV before deciding whether to read it, this means every line must be intentional and easy to understand.

CV writing is all about presentation, two people can have the same experience but their presentation can make one appear more competent and professional than the other.

The principles of a good CV include;

- Clarity: it should be clear and easy to understand.
- Conciseness: it should be short and meaningful.
- Relevance: it should only contain information important to the job.
- Professional tone: it should be formal, without slangs or emotional statements.
- Action oriented language: it should be written in formats like “I developed, managed, coordinated etc.”

A poorly written CV can ruin a strong personal brand while a well written one can strengthen even limited experience by presenting it correctly. A typical CV is written in this order; personal details, professional summary, skills, education, experience, certification or achievements. Below is a structured example, do take note that the format for writing a CV is not rigid.

CURRICULUM VITAE

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Name: Person E
 Phone: +234
 Email: PersonE@email.com
 Location: Anambra, Nigeria

PROFESSIONAL SUMMARY

A motivated and detail oriented graduate with strong communication, organisational and digital skills. Interested in roles within administration where i can controbute effectively and apply problem-solving skills in structured environments.

KEY SKILLS

Strong written and verbal communication
 Microsoft office (Word, Excel, Power point)
 Time management and organisation
 Problem solving and critical thinking

EDUCATION

University of Nigeria
 B.Sc. Human management (2002-2006)
 -relevant management of staffs

EXPERIENCE

Intemed at the human resources department
 Human life limited
 2005

CERTIFICATION

Digital skills training - Google (2008)

Professional communication and negotiation

Professional communication is one of the most essential employability skills in modern workplace. Irrespective of the industry, individuals interact constantly with colleagues, subordinates, supervisors and clients. Poor communication reduces efficiency, create misunderstandings and damage professional relationships.

Professional communication includes; verbal communication, written communication, listening skills, digital communication and workplace etiquette. Effective communication isn't in grammar or a large vocabulary. It is when you are able to express ideas clearly, professionals are expected to communicate respectfully, respond appropriately and maintain professionalism even in stressful conditions.

Written communication is especially important in digital age. Email, reports, online meetings, and virtual collaboration tools now form part of daily professional activity. Poor grammar, unclear language or negative tone may negatively affect professional perception.

Negotiation involves trying to reach an agreement between two or more parties through discussion, communication, and compromise. In a professional context, it is not about winning or dominating the other person; it is about finding a workable outcome that respects both sides' interests.

Many people misunderstand negotiation as something only used in business deals or salary discussions. In reality, negotiation happens in everyday professional life. It appears whenever expectations, responsibilities, resources, or outcomes need to be agreed upon.

The main purpose of negotiation is to create mutual understanding and agreement in situations where interests may not fully align. In the workplace, this helps prevent conflict, improve cooperation, and ensure fairness in decision-making.

Examples include; an employee negotiating workload with a supervisor, a team deciding how to divide tasks, a freelancer agreeing on project terms with a client. In all these cases, negotiation ensures that both sides reach a workable and acceptable arrangement.

Negotiation is closely linked to communication, emotional intelligence, and confidence. It is not about aggression or insisting on personal demands. Instead, it requires the ability to listen, understand, and respond appropriately.

A strong negotiator is usually someone who can express their needs clearly, understand the needs of others, remain calm under pressure, focus on solutions rather than conflict and make reasonable compromises. In professional environments, people who negotiate effectively are often viewed as mature, reliable, and leadership-ready.

Key elements of effective negotiation include;

- Preparation: understand what you want, what the other party may want, and what compromises are realistic.
- Communication: Misunderstandings occur when ideas are not communicated properly.
- Listening: Listening allows you to understand the other party's constraints and motivations.
- Flexibility: Rigid thinking often leads to conflict. Flexibility allows room for agreement and progress.

Take for example, an employee is given a large workload with a tight deadline. Instead of refusing or complaining, the employee can negotiate professionally. Rather than saying "This is too much, I can't do it." They can say "I want to ensure I deliver quality work. Given the current timeline and workload, could we adjust the deadline or redistribute some tasks so I can meet expectations effectively?"

The second response is more effective because it shows responsibility, communicates clearly, focuses on solutions.

Salary and career negotiation is one of the most common forms of negotiation is salary discussion. Many job seekers avoid it due to fear or lack of confidence, but it is a normal part of professional life.

It involves understanding your value in the job market, researching industry standards, communicating your skills and experience, being realistic and respectful. Negotiation is not only about salary. It can also include working hours, job responsibilities and training opportunities.

Emotion plays a major role in negotiation outcomes. Losing control, reacting aggressively, or becoming defensive can weaken your position. Effective negotiation requires patience, calm communication, respect for the other party and ability to separate emotion from decision-making.

Digital skills

Digital skills refer to the ability to use technological tools, digital platforms, and online systems effectively in academic, professional, and everyday environments. In the modern world, digital competence has become an essential employability skill because many workplaces now depend heavily on technology for communication, organization, data management, and productivity.

Basic digital skills include the ability to use computers, emails, word processors, spreadsheets, presentation software, and internet research tools. More advanced digital skills may involve graphic design, coding, digital marketing, content creation, data analysis, or project management software. Regardless of profession, most employers expect individuals to possess at least foundational digital competence.

Digital skills improve efficiency, communication, and access to opportunities. For example, employees may use digital tools to attend virtual meetings, organize files, collaborate remotely, and complete tasks more accurately. Individuals with strong digital literacy are often more adaptable in modern work environments because they can adjust more easily to technological changes.

In addition to employment benefits, digital skills support lifelong learning and professional growth. Online courses, virtual training, and educational resources have made skill acquisition more accessible than ever before. As industries continue evolving through technology, digital competence will remain one of the most important factors influencing employability, productivity, and career advancement in the modern workplace.

There are several ways individuals can develop digital skills effectively. First, consistent practice is important. Regular use of digital tools improves familiarity and confidence over time. Second, online learning platforms such as Coursera, Google Digital Skills, LinkedIn Learning, and YouTube provide accessible opportunities for learning both basic and advanced skills. Third, practical application strengthens understanding. Individuals can improve digital competence by working on projects, volunteering, freelancing, or participating in internships that require technological tools. Finally, staying updated with technological trends helps individuals remain relevant in rapidly changing industries.

Using AI (artificial intelligence)

It is no doubt that AI is slowly being integrated as a key part of human society. Individuals must learn to use AI to remain relevant in their fields.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to computer systems designed to perform tasks that normally require human intelligence, such as generating content, analyzing information, solving problems, and automating processes. In recent years, AI has become increasingly important in education, business, healthcare, communication, and many other industries.

For students and professionals, AI tools can improve productivity and efficiency when used responsibly. Individuals may use AI for brainstorming ideas, summarizing information, improving writing, organizing schedules, conducting research, and learning new concepts. Many workplaces now integrate AI into daily operations to increase speed, accuracy, and decision making efficiency.

However, the use of AI also requires responsibility and critical thinking. AI-generated information may sometimes contain errors, bias, or misinformation. As a result, users should verify information carefully rather than depending on AI completely. Overreliance on AI may weaken creativity, independent thinking, and problem solving ability if individuals stop engaging actively with tasks themselves.

In professional environments, employers increasingly value individuals who understand how to use AI effectively while maintaining originality, ethics, and human judgment. AI should therefore be viewed as a supportive tool rather than a replacement for human intelligence. As technology continues advancing, AI literacy is becoming an important part of digital competence and modern employability.

Using AI to remain relevant in your field means learning how to use it as a tool that improves your productivity, knowledge, creativity, and adaptability rather than seeing it as a replacement for human ability. As workplaces continue integrating technology into daily operations, individuals who understand how to work alongside AI are becoming more competitive and employable.

The first step is understanding how AI applies to your specific field. Different industries use AI differently. For example:

- Writers may use AI for brainstorming, editing, and research support.
- Designers may use AI assisted creative tools.
- Marketers may use AI for analytics and content planning.
- Business professionals may use AI for automation and data organization.
- Educators may use AI for lesson planning and learning support.

Learning the AI tools commonly used within your profession helps you remain aligned with industry trends and workplace expectations.

Another important strategy is using AI to improve efficiency rather than replacing your thinking completely. AI can assist with repetitive tasks, idea generation, summarization, scheduling, and organization, allowing individuals to focus more on creativity, decision making, and problem solving. However, critical thinking remains essential because AI generated information may contain inaccuracies or lack context.

Continuous learning is also necessary. Technology changes rapidly, so professionals who consistently learn new tools and digital systems are more likely to remain relevant. Taking online

courses, attending webinars, experimenting with AI platforms, and following technological developments within your industry can strengthen adaptability.

Most importantly, individuals should combine AI competence with uniquely human skills such as emotional intelligence, communication, creativity, ethics, and leadership. While AI can process information quickly, human judgment and interpersonal abilities remain highly valuable in professional environments.

Work Ethics and Roles

Work ethics are the principles, attitudes, and standards that guide professional behavior within a workplace. They influence how individuals approach responsibilities, interact with others, and maintain professionalism in different work environments. Strong work ethics are highly valued because they contribute to productivity, trust, accountability, and organizational stability.

Important aspects of work ethics include

- Punctuality: arriving at work or meetings on time and completing tasks within set deadlines.
- Honesty: being truthful in reporting work progress, handling finances, communicating mistakes, and interacting with colleagues or clients.
- Discipline: ability to take ownership of assigned tasks and outcomes.
- Accountability: ability to take responsibility for your actions, decisions and their outcomes, whether they were positive or negative.
- Responsibility: ability to take ownership of assigned tasks and outcomes. It's closely linked to accountability.
- Teamwork: ability to cooperate with others toward a shared goal.
- Respect for workplace policies: following the rules, procedures, and ethical guidelines set by the organization.

Employees who consistently demonstrate these qualities are often viewed as reliable and professional. In contrast, poor work ethics such as lateness, irresponsibility, dishonesty, or lack of commitment can negatively affect both individual performance and organizational success.

Understanding workplace roles is also essential in professional environments, every employee within an organization has specific responsibilities and expectations connected to their position. Understanding one's role helps reduce confusion, improve teamwork, and increase efficiency. It also allows individuals to contribute effectively toward organizational goals.

Professional environments often require collaboration between people with different responsibilities. As a result, employees must learn how to perform their individual roles while also supporting collective objectives. Respect for hierarchy, communication channels, and workplace procedures forms part of professional conduct.

Strong work ethics and a clear understanding of workplace roles help individuals build trust, maintain professional relationships, and create long-term career growth opportunities within modern organizations.

Strategy for Growth and Long Term Direction

Personal and professional growth rarely occurs accidentally. Long term progress requires intentional planning, discipline, adaptability, and continuous self-improvement. Individuals who develop clear strategies for growth are often better prepared to navigate challenges, recognize opportunities, and achieve sustainable success over time.

A strategy for growth begins with self-awareness. Individuals must understand their strengths, weaknesses, interests, values, and long term goals before making major decisions. Without clarity and direction, people may move through opportunities without meaningful progress or purpose.

Goal setting is another important aspect of long term growth. Effective goals are usually realistic, measurable, and connected to personal values or career objectives. Breaking large goals into smaller achievable steps can make progress more manageable and less overwhelming.

Continuous learning also plays a significant role in long term development. Industries, technologies, and workplace expectations constantly change, meaning individuals must remain adaptable and willing to acquire new skills. Reading, networking, mentorship, professional training, and practical experiences all contribute to personal and professional growth.

Patience and consistency are equally important. Many individuals become discouraged because they expect immediate success. However, meaningful development often occurs gradually through repeated effort and disciplined habits. Setbacks and failures should therefore be viewed as opportunities for learning rather than permanent defeat.

Long term direction requires intentional decision-making, resilience, and the willingness to grow continuously despite uncertainty and change.

Developing Habits That Build Consistency

Consistency is one of the most important factors influencing personal growth, academic success, and professional development. Many people possess goals, motivation, or talent, but struggle to maintain progress because they lack stable habits. Habits create structure and help individuals continue acting even when motivation decreases.

Habits are repeated behaviors that become part of daily routine over time. Positive habits improve productivity, discipline, and long-term development, while negative habits often contribute to procrastination, inconsistency, and poor performance. Developing strong habits therefore requires intentional effort and self-awareness.

One important strategy for building consistency is starting with small and manageable actions. Many individuals fail because they attempt unrealistic changes too quickly. Small habits repeated consistently are often more sustainable than extreme short-term efforts. For example, studying for thirty minutes daily may produce better long-term results than studying excessively only once in a while.

Environment also affects habit formation. Organized spaces, structured schedules, and reduced distractions can make positive behavior easier to maintain. Individuals should therefore create environments that support productivity and discipline.

Accountability is another useful strategy. Tracking progress, setting deadlines, or sharing goals with mentors and peers can strengthen commitment and reduce inconsistency. Self-reflection also helps individuals identify behaviors that either support or weaken progress.

Consistency is not about perfection. Occasional mistakes or setbacks are normal. What matters most is the ability to continue returning to positive routines over time. Strong habits eventually become the foundation for long-term growth and personal discipline.

Navigating Rejections

Rejection in the workplace is not just a single moment of disappointment; it is often feedback about fit, timing, communication, or strategy. Navigating it well requires treating it as data rather than identity.

When you are turned down for a role, promotion, idea, or opportunity, the first practical step is to resist immediate interpretation. Many people assume rejection means incompetence, but in real work environments decisions are shaped by constraints such as budget, internal candidates, timing, or organizational direction. Your task is to separate emotional reaction from factual understanding. If possible, ask for specific feedback in a calm, professional way. The goal is not justification, but information you can reuse.

After that, do a quick self-audit. Compare what was expected with what you presented. For example, if you were rejected after an interview, examine whether your answers were structured, whether your CV clearly matched the role, or whether you demonstrated measurable impact. This is not self-criticism; it is pattern recognition.

Then adjust deliberately. Improvement in workplace positioning is rarely dramatic; it is usually incremental. That might mean rewriting parts of your CV to highlight outcomes instead of tasks, practicing clearer communication in meetings, or developing one missing skill that repeatedly shows up in feedback.

Finally, maintain visibility without desperation. Continue doing quality work, but avoid overcompensating or withdrawing. People often mismanage rejection by either chasing approval aggressively or disengaging completely. The balanced approach is steady contribution combined with strategic improvement.

Over time, rejection becomes less of a setback and more of a filtering mechanism. It shows you where you are not aligned yet, and where your next adjustment should be.

Recommended Reading

Job literacy

- Bulletproof Your Job – Stephen Viscusi
- Designing Your Life – Bill Burnett & Dave Evans

Skills development

- CV building: What Color Is Your Parachute? – Richard N. Bolles
- CV writing: On Writing Well – William Zinsser
- Digital Skills: The Digital Mindset – Paul Leonardi & Tsedal Neeley
- Communication and Negotiation: Never Split the Difference – Chris Voss
- Using AI: Co-Intelligence: Living and Working with AI – Ethan Mollick

Work Ethics

- Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us – Daniel H. Pink
- The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People – Stephen R. Covey

Habits

- The Power of Habit – Charles Duhigg
- Atomic Habits – James Clear

Navigating the workspace

- Fearless and Free – Wendy Sachs
- Deep Work – Cal Newport

Conclusion

All the tips and information stated in this book is towards the goal of equipping you with the right skills to function properly in the right space. To be able to use them to their full potential, intentionality is important. It's also important to know that growth doesn't come easy and often times requires patience and strategy.

If this book has contributed to your perspective or helped in anyway, do share your feedback with us in our feedback form. Thank you.